

Message Text

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PAGE 01 VIENTI 01237 300443Z

ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PM-05

NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 EB-08 DHA-05 /072 W

-----107707 300451Z /13

R 300405Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8481

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 1237

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4

TAGS: SOCI SHUM MASS LA VM FR EAID ECRE PINS

SUBJECT: CONDITIONS IN SAVANNAKHET

REF: VIENTIANE 1159

1. A RESIDENT OF SAVANNAKHET AUGUST 28 PROVIDED THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION REGARDING LIFE IN THAT CITY.

2. THE CITY IS GARRISONED BY SEVERAL THOUSAND LAO TROOPS. THE SOURCE SAID THAT ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS HE SAW LAO TROOPS BEING MARCHED THROUGH SECTIONS OF THE CITY UNDER VIETNAMESE CADRE COMMAND. HE SAID THAT THERE HAS BEEN NO INSURGENT ACTIVITY NEAR THE CITY FOR SEVERAL MONTHS (SEE COMMENT PARA 7).

3. OBTAINING FOOD IS A CONSTANT STRUGGLE FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS WITH MEAT SOLD SECRETLY IN SMALL QUANTITIES IN MERCHANTS' HOMES AND RICE AVAILABLE ONLY IN SMALL QUANTITIES AT VERY HIGH PRICES. GASOLINE IS TRUCKED IN
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FROM VIETNAM. IT IS LOW OCTANE AND USUALLY CONTAMINATED BY WATER.

4. THE CITY POPULATION HAS DWINDLED TO APPROXIMATELY 15,000 WITH MOST OF THE FORMER LAO RESIDENTS HAVING FLED TO THAILAND OR TO RURAL FAMILY FARMS. HE SAID THAT MOST OF THE CITY'S CHINESE POPULATION HAS ALSO

LEFT LAOS. THE PRICE EXACTED BY THE LAO AUTHORITIES FOR PERMISSION TO THE CHINESE TO LEAVE IS CONFISCATION OF VIRTUALLY ALL PERSONAL PROPERTY.

5. THOUGH LACKING IN MOST AMENITIES, SAVANNAKHET IS ABOUT TO INAUGURATE A FIRST CLASS WATER SYSTEM. THE THREE MILLION DOLLAR FRENCH AID PROJECT WAS ORIGINALLY DESIGNED TO MEET THE NEEDS OF A CITY OF 50,000. THE PROJECT, DUE FOR COMPLETION APPROXIMATELY LATE OCTOBER, WILL PURIFY WATER AT A RATE APPROXIMATELY FIFTEEN TIMES GREATER THAN THE SHRUNKEN CITY'S REQUIREMENTS, ACCORDING TO ONE OF TWO FRENCH OFFICIALS ASSIGNED TO THE PROJECT.

6. THE SOURCE SAID THAT THE ONLY WESTERNERS IN THE CITY ARE TWO FRENCH EXPERTS ASSIGNED TO THE WATER PROJECT (PARA 5). SOVIET PILOTS FLY LAO AIRLINES DOMESTIC FLIGHTS INTO THE CITY WEEKLY, BUT DO NOT REMAIN OVERNIGHT.

7. COMMENT: SOURCE HAS REPORTED RELIABLY ON DEVELOPMENTS IN SAVANNAKHET IN THE PAST. SOURCE'S COMMENTS ON THE INSURGENCY (PARA 2) SEEM TO INDICATE THE HE WAS UNACCOUNTABLY UNAWARE OF THE RECENT ATTACK ON THE SAVANNAKHET SHELL OIL DEPOT (REFTEL)
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